

Editorial

The junk-food bin in the school hall

Public schools that sell **junk food** and soft drinks to children are contributing to the nation's childhood-obesity epidemic. It's time for them to stop.

Last year, this page stopped short of supporting a statewide ban on soft drinks in public schools. But times are changing. It is becoming increasingly clear that obesity is a public-health issue that demands bold state action.

There's not sufficient political will to ban soda and **junk food** sales this legislative session, as one bill proposes. Alternative pending legislation would create a model nutrition policy for the state and require districts to adopt their own policies by 2005. It's a decent compromise — for now.

But this state should seriously consider its commitment to children's health and back it up with action.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recently drew a clear connection between sugary drinks, obesity and other health risks, including calcium deficiencies and cavities. The prescription for schools? Stop selling soda.

The state of California and the nation's two largest school districts have banned soft-drink sales on school campuses.

Considering the rising rate of obesity in this country and the serious health problems associated with it, there's no defensible reason to sell soda pop in schools.

Washington's problem is not yet as severe as California's, where one of every three children is overweight. But that state's predicament should serve as our warning.

Soft-drink and vending machines don't have to be emptied. There are plenty of healthy drinks for students, including 100-percent juice, milk and bottled water. As for **junk food**, the pending legislation would help schools sort out nutrition information and create a policy to promote healthy snack choices. That, too, will likely be just the beginning.

Schools — and states — can no longer ignore the critical role they play in children's health. It makes no sense to teach students about good nutrition in the classroom, then let them buy sugary soft drinks and **junk food** down the hall.